

The President's Daily Brief

August 23, 1976

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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KOREA: *Pyongyang's public reaction to the tree-clearing operation in the Joint Security Area at Panmunjom is worded in strong terms and includes direct criticism of you. Within the North Korean context, however, the reaction is generally restrained, and the military alert has been reduced.*

The North Korean government has not issued a public statement on the US operation. The media have portrayed the tree-felling as proof that the US instigated last Wednesday's violent incident. An article in the party daily charged that the two incidents were "directly linked with each other" and aimed at provoking the North into another war.

North Korea has not released to the public the message Kim Il-song, in his capacity as supreme commander of the armed forces, sent to General Stilwell, which termed the incident on Wednesday "regrettable." That message was read at the meeting of the Military Armistice Commission that the North requested shortly after the tree-felling operation. The meeting was attended only by the senior representatives of the US and North Korean delegations.

South Korea has shown renewed concern, as a result of the MAC meeting, about the possibility that the US might get involved in bilateral negotiations with North Korea on political matters.

According to the US embassy, both the South Korean defense minister and foreign minister met with US officials on August 22 to probe our reaction to Kim Il-song's message.

Seoul also seems concerned that the US will be too easily satisfied by the relatively conciliatory tone of the North Korean message. South Korean officials have urged the US to continue to press for a formal apology, punishment of the offenders, and assurances that such incidents will not be repeated. They have urged that US forces recently sent to South Korea not be reduced until these conditions are met.

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The USSR and China have avoided comment on the tree-clearing.

Following the lines of their treatment of the Wednesday incident, Soviet and Chinese radio broadcasts have replayed selected portions of Pyongyang's account of the operation.

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LEBANON: Heavy and indiscriminate artillery barrages continue in Beirut despite several attempts to work out an agreement to end the shelling.

The major commercial center of West Beirut was shelled Saturday while the streets were filled with shoppers--a departure from the previous pattern of confining most shelling in commercial areas to night hours.

Leftist leader Jumblatt has categorically rejected Christian proposals for the Palestinians' withdrawal from positions in the mountains east of Beirut. Fighting in the Mount Lebanon area is still confined largely to exchanges of artillery and machinegun fire.

There are signs that the Palestinians are beginning to suffer a shortage of manpower.

Palestinian officials have confirmed that PLO leader Yasir Arafat issued a conscription decree after the fall of Tall Zatar refugee camp. Fedayeen organizations have now begun identifying Palestinian men of military age.

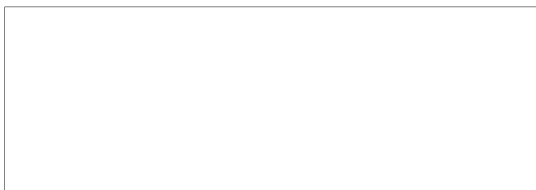
Egyptian Foreign Minister Fahmy reportedly continues to seek support for holding an Arab summit.

Only four countries have officially informed the Arab League secretariat that they approve of a meeting, but seven others are said to have indicated support, thereby making the majority necessary for holding the conference.

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Asad will find it difficult to hold out against a conference with the Saudis pushing the idea. At the same time, he can probably count on Riyadh's cooperation in trying to dilute any resolution that would endanger his fundamental Lebanese policy.

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NOTES

There are no new developments in the Greek-Turkish situation.

The Turkish research ship Sismik I apparently continued its seismic explorations over the weekend while the UN Security Council tried to draft a compromise resolution on the Aegean dispute. The Sismik is scheduled to return to port early this week to prepare for three more missions.

The International Court of Justice has invited Turkey to send representatives to the hearing Wednesday on Greece's application for an interim injunction calling on Ankara to halt its exploration in disputed Aegean waters.

* * *

Egyptian President Sadat's public promises to take some kind of action against Libyan President Qadhafi are putting Sadat in a difficult position. This morning's apparent hijacking--possibly to Libya--of an Egyptian passenger aircraft makes Sadat's position even more difficult.

Sadat cannot keep up the harsh talk for long, while still avoiding an overt move against Libya, without further damaging his popular standing--already undercut by severe domestic economic problems. He has now been quoted by one Cairo newspaper, referring to recent bombings and in the context of his refusal to accept mediation offers pressed by Arab leaders at the Nonaligned Conference in Colombo, as saying that "we cannot stand idle when it comes to killing the people of Egypt."

Security officials are coming under fire for their failure to stop the bombings. According to an official of the Egyptian Interior Ministry, crowds shouted hysterically against investigating police officers at the scene of the recent explosion on an Alexandria train.

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Former Thai military leader Praphat left Bangkok for Taiwan yesterday.

Clashes between university students and a right-wing organization that left two dead and 30 to 40 injured apparently were cited to persuade Praphat to leave earlier than he had previously agreed.

Although Praphat's departure reduces pressure on Prime Minister Seni, the entire episode has further weakened the government's position. The absence of any viable alternative to Seni at the moment is his strongest suit for remaining in place. He may find it necessary, however, to reshuffle his cabinet.

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The political declaration of the nonaligned summit in Colombo, Sri Lanka, criticizes the US within the context of situations in Korea, Puerto Rico, Panama, and the Middle East.

Nevertheless, the political and economic declarations of the conference did not take the movement significantly further to the left. India, Yugoslavia, and Sri Lanka played unexpectedly active roles--particularly in hammering out the political declaration--by opposing initiatives of such radical states as Cuba and Vietnam. Algeria, heretofore the effective leader of the radical wing of the movement, was preoccupied with its dispute with Morocco over Western Sahara and failed to focus on most of the issues before the conference.

The final resolutions of the summit--many of them pressed by individual states and not included in the declarations--will reflect more radical positions. Full texts of summit documents are not yet available.

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